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THE PREPARATORY COURSE IN ENGLISH.¹

THE aim of the teacher of English in secondary schools and the aim of the teacher of English in the universities are the same—to give the pupil a personal knowledge of some portions of English literature, and the ability to write sensibly and correctly. It is impossible to formulate any method suitable for all cases, and any method this paper may suggest must be considered merely as one possible means to the end. But to decide whether the student has attained the standard requisite for entrance to the university is necessary and possible. Hence, having laid down the rule that “no candidate will be accepted in English whose work is seriously defective in point of spelling, punctuation, grammar, or division into paragraphs,” the university constructs an examination which aims to test the pupil in both of the divisions indicated above—knowledge of literature and ability to write. For convenience and completeness the examination is divided into three parts: (1) topics for compositions, (2) questions in grammar and rhetoric, (3) questions demanding a knowledge of the elementary facts of the history of English literature and an intimate acquaintance with the books prescribed for careful study.

For the purposes of the entrance examination these subjects are not of equal importance. The pupil should have gained a knowledge of grammar in the grammar school, and the work in grammar done in the high school or academy should be in the nature of a review. Practically, the rhetoric taught in the high school must be of an elementary nature, and merely anticipatory

¹ This is the first of a series of articles prepared by the Examiners in the several departments of the University of Chicago that are concerned with entrance examinations. The articles are prepared primarily for the guidance of those who are fitting students for the University of Chicago; it is believed, however, that they will prove helpful to all secondary teachers who have to prepare pupils for college or university.

of what is to come in the university. These two subjects, as well as literary history, are, for the ordinary high-school student, not as important as a real knowledge of the books prescribed and the ability to write fluently and correctly.

These divisions will here be taken up not exactly in the order of their importance. Composition, the first division, will be reserved for the last, and the third division, that relating to the reading and the literary history, will be considered first.

In this third division itself we find a question of relative importance. The possession of enough facts concerning the development of English literature to enable the student to pursue with advantage his further studies at the university is essential. But the training gained by a critical and scholarly reading of the books prescribed for minute reading, and the general stimulating effect gained from reading (as literature) all the books prescribed is more essential. These subsections will here be taken up in the inverse order of importance.

The amount of literary history deemed necessary for the pupil entering college is fairly well indicated by Stopford Brooke's *Primer of English Literature*, or pages 271-365 of Meiklejohn's *English Language*. The candidate should know the approximate dates of the great periods of English literature, the names of the most important authors and their principal works. He should know, for instance, that Chaucer was the chief literary figure of fourteenth-century England, and that Pope and Johnson dominated the pseudo-classicism of the eighteenth century. He should know that Goldsmith wrote the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and that George Eliot wrote *Middlemarch*, *Romola*, *Adam Bede*, and so forth. He should also be given some slight hint of the spirit of these men and periods, and made to feel that the march of literary history is continuous. But the mere memorizing of lists of names and dates should be discouraged. Above all, these facts should be taught as history, and reinforced by details from the other fields of history.

If time served, the university would recommend that the candidates acquire a first-hand knowledge of at least one of the

works of each writer of prime importance. But this is obviously impossible. Hence the university selects a fairly representative list of books, some to be read carefully, but not minutely, others to be read with a higher degree of detailed examination. To extend widely the list of books read in class seems unwise, because in the ordinary high-school course it is impossible to cover a large field thoroughly. But outside reading, directed and commented on in class by the teacher should be encouraged. In all reading the aim should be to give the pupil some appreciation of the books as literature. The list for 1896 is a fair sample of the amount and nature of the class-reading desired. It includes, for careful but not minute reading, Shakspeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Defoe's *History of the Plague in London*, Irving's *Tales of a Traveller*, Scott's *Woodstock*, Macaulay's *Essay on Milton*, Longfellow's *Evangeline*, and George Eliot's *Silas Marner*; for minute reading, Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Milton's *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso* and *Lycidas*, and Webster's *First Bunker Hill Oration*.

A certain number of these books are modern enough to be read straightaway, with little exegesis. Irving's *Tales of a Traveller*, Webster's *First Bunker Hill Oration*, Scott's *Woodstock*, Longfellow's *Evangeline*, Macaulay's *Essay on Milton* and George Eliot's *Silas Marner* are for us so nearly contemporaneous that they may be read with only enough comment from the teacher to give the student the needed historical background, to develop to some extent an understanding of the author's literary qualities and to clear up any slight obscurities which may exist. That is, these books may, and should be read as essay, poem, or story, for the human and literary interest there is in them. The teacher should aim to let the facts speak for themselves, and to try to arouse whatever latent sense of romance or really literary judgment there may be in the students.

With the other books in the list, however, the case is different. *Comus*, *Lycidas*, *As You Like It* and the *Merchant of Venice* have, to be sure, like *Woodstock* and *Silas Marner*, a literary quality that must in some way be brought out. So far the tasks

coincide. But the works of Shakespeare and Milton are so rich in allusion, and have a vocabulary and an idiom so different from those of our day, that, to one who has never studied the language of these men as language, their meaning is often entirely unknown and even unguessable. The study of sources is, for school children, of no value. But such passages as Lorenzo's speech about the music of the spheres must be explained at length. Such constructions as the "king of smiles," the "valued file," and the proleptic use of adjectives, as in "the air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses," need not be named, but must be explained. Finally, the difference in meaning in our modern use of such words as "single," "motion," "addressed" and "state" must be pointed out. This can, perhaps, best be done by a careful and very minute reading in class of at least one play of Shakespeare and one long poem of Milton, with a considerable sum of linguistic, historical, and literary comment. So all sides of the poem or play may be treated, the student may get his information in the informal way most suitable to youth, and the linguistic comment may be forced into its natural and subordinate position. For, however much insistence is placed on the need of linguistic study, such study is but a means to the end of getting the full literary flavor of the work under consideration.

The questions put by the examiners try to test the student as to (1) his knowledge of the actual difficulties in the text, and (2) the amount of his literary appreciation. He will be asked to comment fully on the difficult constructions and the allusions in several passages chosen from the books prescribed for minute reading. He will also be asked to express his opinion of certain simple literary questions, or to show by his method of recounting a scene or an event that he has really understood and appreciated it. He may, for instance, be asked to explain the phrase, "Sweet Queen of Parley, daughter of the spheres," or, the various parts of the examination playing into each other's hands, to write a composition in which he compares George Eliot's narrative style with that of De

Foe, or recounts the expulsion of Silas Marner from Lantern Yard.

The question of the text-books to be employed is important. In general, the Clarendon Press edition of Shakespeare is to be highly commended. The notes are brief, accurate, and not overburdened with so-called æsthetic comment. When these are not to be had, Rolfe's edition is acceptable. The Clarendon Press edition of Milton, as revised by Henry Bradley, shares the praise accorded to the Clarendon Press Shakespeare. A careful, but perhaps over-edited, set of most of the books prescribed by the colleges is published by Longmans, Green & Co.

GRAMMAR AND RHETORIC

This portion of the entrance requirement will occupy one-fourth of the examination period. The subjects of grammar and rhetoric in the secondary school are deemed of importance subordinate to English composition, and should be pursued not for their own sake, but as aids to proficiency in expression. The following summary will indicate in part the nature of the question in grammar: the correct use of the auxiliary verbs—shall and will, may, can, might, etc.; the principal parts of irregular verbs, such as lie, lay, sit, set, get, eat, etc.; the proper use of relative pronouns and of verb tenses; irregular plural forms, agreements, etc. The examiner may offer for correction sentences containing *one* obvious error in grammar, and require the candidate to give sound grammatical reasons for his decisions. If the student is familiar with Latin he need not use a special text-book in English grammar; the required reading, the exercises in composition, and the class recitations will furnish in many cases sufficient opportunities for specific grammatical drill. The difference between grammatical and rhetorical blunders should be put clearly before the pupil. The teacher will find Strang's *Exercises in English* (in the revised form, D. C. Heath & Co., Boston, 1893) a useful drill-book. It may not be considered wise, however, to place this or any similar set of examples of poor English in the hands of immature students. A. S.

Hill's *Foundations of Rhetoric* (pp. 32-153) and A. S. Hill's *Principles of Rhetoric* (pp. 48-73) deal with common blunders in syntax. A useful book for more extended study is Longman's *School Grammar*, by David Salmon. It should be borne in mind that *all parts* of the examination paper serve to test the student's knowledge in this subject; he should be able to speak grammatically, to write grammatically, and to explain grammatical constructions.

Rhetorical principles may be adequately illustrated and taught in the composition class without special study of a text-book. In most cases, however, the teacher will find it advisable to supplement class instruction by the study of an elementary treatise of rhetoric and composition. Wherever the teacher employs a text-book stress should be laid upon the intimate relationship of rhetoric to expression, oral and written; rhetoric should not be studied, certainly at this stage, as an end in itself.

Therefore such subjects (frequently treated at length in rhetorics designed for secondary schools) as kinds of composition, figures of speech, prosody, oratory, and an extended discussion of the qualities of style are deemed unsuitable for the immature student. Of primary importance on the other hand are questions relating to diction, viz., the right and the wrong use of words commonly misapplied, synonyms, slang, barbarisms, provincialisms, etc.; sentences, viz., punctuation, the loose and the periodic form, the unity, coherence, and length of sentence; paragraphs, viz., the nature, object, and form, and the principles of unity and coherence; compositions, viz., methods of building and of connecting the parts. All these rhetorical matters may be discussed with profit when the student is first consciously engaging in the problems of composition. Such text-books as A. S. Hill's *Foundations of Rhetoric* (with Buehler's *Exercises*), Genung's *Outlines of Rhetoric*, G. R. Carpenter's *Exercises in Rhetoric and Composition* (elementary course), and Scott and Denney's *Composition-Rhetoric* are suggested as suitable treatises. The university examiners disapprove of the premature

use of more advanced works, such as Genung's *Practical Rhetoric* or A. S. Hill's *Principles*, for experience has shown that when these books have been used while the candidates have but a confused idea of much they have passed over, they are unwilling to attempt further careful rhetorical study. In general it may be said that, whatever is concerned with the ornate, the purely æsthetic or the theoretic should be lightly touched upon. From the examiner's point of view, no glibness in the theory of rhetoric will offset ignorance in the practical application as shown in composition.

COMPOSITION

Every part of the examination book in English furnishes a test of the candidate's power to write simple, correct, and fluent English. Moreover, books in other subjects wherever practicable, as in history, may be examined for additional evidence. The specific exercise in composition is of the following nature: a number of topics, suggested by the books for general reading, are offered, from which the candidate will select one or more. The topics require merely the ability to summarize poem, play, novel, or essay; to describe a scene, or to write a simple, natural criticism or comparison of two or more works. The student should have something to say on the topic chosen, and, as far as possible, the thought should be his own. He should express that thought in a clearly constructed, short composition consisting of suitable, definite paragraph units. The aim of this exercise is twofold: to test the student's correctness in diction and sentence structure, and to test his powers of formulating his thought coherently.

In judging these compositions the examiner takes into account the following matters: first, under the general head of *illiteracy*, blunders in spelling words commonly used, especially names of authors. No candidate will be admitted who misspells, roughly speaking, over 2 per cent. of his vocabulary. Blunders in the use of capital letters and in simple punctuation, *e. g.*, the use of the comma for the period, the semicolon for the comma,

the total absence or misplacement of commas, and the inability to apply the semicolon in simple compound sentences. Blunders in grammar, especially misuse of shall and will, wrong use of neither or nor, superlative instead of comparative form of adjectives, lack of agreement between subject and predicate, the loose use of participles. Blunders in the use of common words, such as mutual, act, action, balance, remainder, party, person, individual, accept, except, affect, effect, allude, claim, loan, locate, etc. Blunders in sentences, such as the following examples (taken from admission papers 1893-1896, University of Chicago) will illustrate:

EXAMPLES OF FAULTY SENTENCES

1. Of course not all young men fall into such a state, nor even the majority, but there are many who do, and for them success is doubtful. [Loose and lacking in unity.]

2. From whose number the president appointed a board. [Incomplete.]

3. I could hear a rustling, I knew the birds were preparing to rest. [Two sentences punctuated as one.]

4. She went her way in silence, while the blinding snow was unheeded, and no one took notice of her. [Incoherent structure.]

5. The gas having been turned down, he stumbled about in the darkness. [The clumsy "absolute construction".]

6. Hardly are we accustomed to the methods of one teacher before we are turned over to another and worst of all one teacher is expected to know how to teach half-a-dozen different subjects. [Lack of unity.]

The common blunder of paragraphing each statement, or of making no paragraph units is the final point under this head.

The second general head may be termed *faults of crudeness and carelessness*: (1) an insufficient vocabulary, and (2) insufficient acquaintance with the books prescribed. The candidate should have at his command a vocabulary wide enough to express his thoughts without frequent repetition of words already used in

the paragraph, and to enable him to choose from a number of words the one best suited for his purpose. Candidates frequently present themselves for admission who have read only a few of the books on the lists for the year, or who have read the works so carelessly that about any one topic they have but a scanty stock of ideas. The only remedies for this deficiency are greater care in reading and reviewing the texts, the requirement by the teacher of frequent summaries, and discussions in class of the matter of fact and of literary appreciation suggested by the reading.

Some positive considerations may be stated under a third head. What kind of information about the masterpieces read in preparation for the examination should the candidate possess? How should he treat the topics on which he is to write his short composition? In the first place the examiner finds the tendency to prepare students with one stock essay on each book studied deplorable. Frequent exercises in composition on each novel, essay, or poem, are essential, but no one set of ideas should be given the candidate to be reproduced on any possible clue in the examination paper. Furthermore the student should be sufficiently familiar with the contents of all the books to discuss readily and intelligently a character, a scene, or an argument taken from any one, and to compare one style or subject with another. Granted that the candidate has made himself familiar with the subject-matter, he should be able next to build his essay, constructing it in his mind or on paper before he attempts to write it out in full. He should have the power to review his work, once written, and at least to free it from all errors. The final test of a candidate's ability to write adequately is this power to construct a well-proportioned essay, and in revision to see his subject as a whole.

ILLITERATE COMPOSITION

THE PAYMENT OF THE BOND

1. Antonio was a merchant of venice, who had many ships, plying between Venice, and other points, which not having

arrived, as soon as he expected, was in need of some money. He meets his friend Bassanio, who tells him of a rich jew, named Shylock, from whom he could borrow some money, until his ships arrived.

2. They go to Shylock who lends Antonio the money, on condition, that, if he fails to pay back the money within three

FAULTY SENTENCES

PORTIA'S AND BASSANIO'S TROUBLES

Portia was the orphan daughter of a wealthy man, who at his death left three cases one of Gold, one of Silver and one of Lead and whatever suitor there was for her hand must choose his answer from one of the three cases as her picture was in the lucky one, but whoever chose and lost could never in future sue for a maiden's hand in marriage. Suitors came from the whole civilized world and some on learning the conditions went away without choosing. But for all that so did Portia was quite thankful.

(2) Finally heralds came announcing the approach of one, "Bassanio." His appearance was quite pleasing to Portia, more so than to any of her former suitors. She begged him to delay his choice for a few days for she feared he would lose under the conditions of her Father's will and she was loathe to part with his company so soon.

(3) Bassanio was anxious to make the choice immediately, so Portia sang to him while he read the inscriptions on the cases. The song indicated to him on which case her likeness could be found. Following this Bassanio asked for the key to the Leaden case. He opened it and found the picture of Portia.

(4) News now came to Bassanio of the loss of all his friends ships that were given in

PARAGRAPHS. ILLITERACY. IMMATURITY

A. 4. The story of Portia and Bassanio is one of love, bringing in the will of Portia's father.

Portia was a rich and beautiful woman living in Belmont,

whom many princes and suitors came to win, but all were not successful, except Bassanio.

Bassanio, after having been assisted by his friend Antonio, went to Belmont to try his chance with the caskets, which Portia's father had left, for the suitors of Portia to choose from to win her.

Bassanio after several little speeches upon examining the golden silver and leaden caskets, chose the leaden, in which was Portia's picture by which he knew he was successful.

So Bassanio and Portia were betrothed. The bond of Antonio and Shylock is another story to be told.

Antonio, a rich merchant of Venice, had several ships at sea, and with them all his available property was contained; so when asked for money by Bassanio he had to borrow it from Shylock the Jew. But Shylock would not let him have the money unless Antonio would give a bond, stating that he would allow Shylock to take a pound of flesh from whatever part of the body of Antonio, Shylock wished.

The bond was sealed and when the time for the payment of the money came, and when Antonio's ships had not yet returned, Shylock brought Antonio into court and was about to take his bond when Portia in guise of a judge entered.

Portia plead with him on the side of mercy, and since that was of no avail, commanded him to take his bond but in taking it he was not to spill one drop of blood or take more or less flesh than that bond stated.